



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE  
Samantha Kerkman, County Executive

1010 – 56<sup>th</sup> Street, Third Floor  
Kenosha, Wisconsin 53140  
(262) 653-2600  
Fax: (262) 653-2817

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News release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Tami Rongstad  
262-653-2831

## **Blue Ribbon Committee seeking private support for historic Ceremonial Courtroom restoration**

KENOSHA — A Blue Ribbon Committee of community leaders is now actively working to raise private donations for a proposed restoration of the historic Ceremonial Courtroom in the Kenosha County Courthouse, County Executive Samantha Kerkman announced today.

The committee’s objective is to raise \$1.35 million in private funds to achieve a \$675,000 match from the prestigious Jeffris Family Foundation. That challenge grant requires a 2-to-1 match of private funds in order for it to be received.

The Blue Ribbon Committee, which has been conducting planning meetings since late 2021, is co-chaired by former Kenosha County Executive John Collins and retired Circuit Court Judge Mary K. Wagner.

“It would be a wonderful thing for our county if the private funds can be raised to restore this historic space to its former splendor,” Kerkman said. “I support and appreciate the efforts of the Blue Ribbon Committee, which is working hard to make the project a reality. It would be especially meaningful to see it to fruition by 2025, when our Courthouse will turn 100 years old.”

A two-story-tall space located on the second floor of the Courthouse, the Ceremonial Courtroom maintains a stately presence, though much of its original ornamentation is now obscured by a drop ceiling that was installed when central air conditioning was added to the room in the 1960s.

Concealed above the drop ceiling is a large, inlaid glass skylight, highly detailed ornamental plaster, and a frieze that rings the room with a quote from Abraham Lincoln on “Law”:

*“Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others.”*

The skylight and ornamentation were partially damaged by the 1960s installation of mechanical equipment, but a micro restoration conducted in 2020 demonstrated the viability of a full-scale restoration.

“Fixing this courtroom up, restoring it to its previous glory, is not about the politicians, the elected officials, the judges,” said Collins, who served as county executive from 1986 to 1998. “It’s about the community, because this is really a magnificent community space that was put here by our forebearers. The community ought to be proud of it, and we ought to show our pride by supporting the restoration of this room.”

Wagner, who retired in July 2021 after 30 years on the Circuit Court bench, said the courtroom can and should be restored as a space that could have many uses.

“It’s such a symbol of the grandeur of the law,” Wagner said. “What a fantastic edifice it is, what a tribute to the law of our community, to justice in our community. And it’s a room that can be used in the community for a variety of events besides court. There are opportunities to hold functions that are important, that would meet the significance of the room.”

In addition to Collins, Wagner and Kerkman, the Blue Ribbon Committee members include:

- Tamarra Coleman
- Anthony Davis
- Patrice (Pam) Drummond
- Neil F. Guttormsen
- Len Iaquina
- Heather Iverson
- County Board Supervisor Zach Rodriguez
- Retired Judge Wilbur W. Warren III
- Jane Harrington-Heide
- Tami Rongstad

More information about the project, including images and videos, is available online at <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/supportthecourtroom>.

Tax-deductible donations to support the project may be made to the Kenosha Community Foundation, the fiscal sponsor of the courtroom restoration project. Online donations may be made by clicking a button on the above-mentioned webpage.

For more information about the project and donations, please contact the Office of the County Executive at 262-653-2600.

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